



Research-Based Writing Supported by Over 30 Years of Proven Results

September 2017

The Collins Writing Exchange

Ideas, Tips, and Resources on Writing from [Collins Education Associates](#)

Featured Writing Assignment

Writing Tasks to Gauge Students' Needs

With a new academic year under way, we are all trying to get a handle on our students' writing strengths and weaknesses. In some cases, we may be able to look at students' work from last school year. But an excellent way to see where students are *right now* is to have them write about a familiar topic, one that is easy for them to elaborate on.

This month's featured writing assignments can serve as valuable pre-assessment tools. No special prior knowledge is required of students, and the Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) serve as a guide for organizing and presenting their ideas. Your review of these pieces will guide you on future assignments and FCAs.

The assignments below are ready to use, complete with prewriting activities, graphic organizers, and teaching suggestions.

- [A Special Day in My Life](#) (primary grades)
- [Describing a Family Member](#) (upper elementary grades)
- [Describing a Special Place](#) (middle school)
- [A Moment in Time](#) (high school)
- ["Who Am I?" Autobiographical Sketch](#) (upper elementary through high school)

Special Note:

Teachers consistently rate in-class support as their most-valued professional development. To support your teachers' use of the program, consider having a Collins Associate demonstrate one of these assignments or model other lessons in your classrooms. To learn more about our [professional development options](#), contact us by [email](#) or at 1-800-932-4477.

New! Online Professional Development

Coffee with Collins Webinar

As you look at ways to support your school's implementation of Collins Writing this year, consider Coffee with Collins. These 1-



to 2½-hour online sessions with John Collins or your Collins Associate are a cost-effective, time-saving way to support your writing program. All sessions are tailored to your specific needs. See our [flyer](#) for more information or call us at 1-800-932-4477.

Communicating with Parents

Engaging and Informing Parents about Writing Instruction

Parents can be important allies in our efforts to improve student writing. Many parents ask, "How can we help at home?" An effective way to enlist parent support is to make sure they understand the strategies you are using in the classroom. Let them know how you are helping students become better writers and how you are using writing in all content areas.

In a recent *New York Times* interview titled "[What Parents Can Do to Nurture Good Writers.](#)" Steve Graham, a pre-eminent researcher on writing instruction, answers several questions about how parents can help.

A consistent theme throughout the interview that is supported by Graham's research is to give selective feedback on student work and avoid the temptation of overwhelming writers with numerous corrections. That's one of the benefits Collins Writing teachers gain by using FCAs in their writing instruction.

To inform parents about Collins strategies being used in the classroom, we have model letters, both [elementary](#) and [secondary](#) versions, that you can use or adapt.

Letter Explaining the Five Types of Writing. This letter could go home early in the year and then again later to explain to parents the basic structure of your program.

Dear Parent(s):

This year your child will be doing a great deal of writing in my class. I strongly believe that writing is critical for the development of oral and written language as well as thinking skills. We will be writing stories about ourselves and about what we are learning in all subject areas.

We will be using the Collins Writing Program, which involves five different kinds of writing
Elementary Letter Excerpt

Classroom Strategies That Work

Key Principles for Teaching Writing

The Writing Revolution (TWR), a new book by Judith Hochman and Natalie Wexler, has already received positive notice since its publication in August. Based on Hochman's instructional successes with a variety of schools, including high-poverty schools, *The Writing Revolution* approach is built around "six principles for teaching writing." View the *Marshall Memo* [summary](#) of Hochman and Wexler's *American Educator* article which includes a brief description of TWR's six principles.

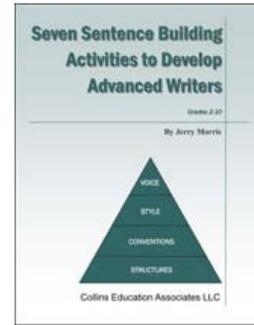
Collins Writing teachers will note how consistent the principles are with key tenets of the Collins Writing Program, particularly:

- Principle 2: "Sentences are the building blocks of all writing."

- Principle 5: "Grammar is best taught in the context of student writing."

One way Collins teachers have successfully followed those principles is by using *Seven Sentence Building Activities to Develop Advanced Writers*, written by Collins Associate Jerry Morris. [Download Activity One](#) to try it with your students to experience the power of this engaging approach.

Seven Sentence Building Activities to Develop Advanced Writers is available in both print and PDF formats at our [web store](#). You can also [preview the book](#).



Convention Wisdom

One-Minute Clinic: Quotation Marks



Whether in a story's dialogue or in quotes excerpted from a source in a research paper, we will see many uses (and misuses) of quotation marks by our students this year. The rules for using quotation marks correctly seem straightforward enough, but problems with these "inverted double commas" date back to the 1500s when they first emerged in our language to indicate quoted words. (For an entertaining history of how dingles, indents, and outdents evolved into modern quotation marks, see Keith Houston's fascinating book *Shady Characters: The Secret Life of Punctuation, Symbols & Other Typographical Marks*.)

Look at the four sentences below and see if you can determine which one has no quotation mark mistakes. Can you identify the problems with the other sentences?

1. Coach was always saying, "Plan the work, and work the plan."
2. I loved when he asked "Are you with me or against me"?
3. Who said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country?"
4. "All our dreams can come true," Walt Disney once said, "If we have the courage to pursue them."

See the [answer key](#) to check on your answers. Download a PDF with essential quotation mark rules from our *Check Mate* quick reference guides for:

- [Level P](#) (grades 2-3)
- [Level A](#) (grades 4-6)
- [Level B](#) (grades 6-9)
- [Level C](#) (grades 9-12)

Special Note:

Check Mate, the student guide for essential conventions, can help your students with quotation marks and other rules of writing. You can also purchase the [Essential Conventions](#) Teacher Resource Guide (\$25 for the PDF; \$30 for the hard copy). Download the free [Samplers](#) of each Teacher Resource Guide to try with your students before you buy.

Quick Links

Free Collins Formatted Papers

Get your year off to a great start by establishing effective writing routines. Go to our [Free Resources](#) web page and view a variety of Collins formatted writing papers to use with your students. Choose from an array of formats that make editing and grading easier.

There are papers for Types One and Two Writing, for Type Three, and for emerging primary writers. There's even blank paper with X's on every other line to remind students to skip lines. Download the formats that work best for your students and get started right away.

A Sampling of Collins Formatted Papers:

[Type 1 and Type 2](#)

[Type 3](#)

[See More](#)

Upcoming Events

John Collins, Henry Dembowski, Bill Atwood, and Kristine Gibson in Pennsylvania



Date	Location	Session	Grades	Presenter
9/27/17	Williamsport, PA	How Did You get That? Improving Open Responses in Math	2-12	Bill Atwood
10/2/17	Homestead, PA	Improving Student Performance Through Writing and Thinking Across the Curriculum	4-12	John Collins
10/9/17	Curwensville, PA	How Did You Get That? Improving Written Responses in Math	K-12	Kristine Gibson
10/9/17	Johnstown, PA	Meeting the Cross-Curricular Challenge of Literacy Standards	K-2	Heather Spotts
10/9/17	Johnstown, PA	Focus on Three Essential Writing Assignments (Day 2)	3-12	John Collins
10/9/17	Pittsburgh, PA	Improving Student Performance Through Writing and Thinking Across the Curriculum	7-12	Henry Dembowski
10/12/17	Enola, PA	Improving Student Performance Through Writing and Thinking Across the Curriculum	3-12	John Collins
10/19/17	CIU #10, State College, PA	The Big Three: Research-Based Practices That Make	3-12	John Collins

		the Greatest Impact on Student Achievement		
10/19/17	CIU #10, West Decatur, PA	Developing a Strong Foundation of Writing Skills Through the Collins Writing Program (Day 1)	K-3	Kristine Gibson
10/26/17	Macclenny, FL	Improving Student Performance Through Writing and Thinking Across the Curriculum	K-12	Gary Chadwell
11/6-8/17	AMLE2017 Conference, Philadelphia, PA	Blueprint for Powerhouse Assessments	5-9	Cheryl McDonough
11/6-8/17	AMLE2017 Conference, Philadelphia, PA	<p>Sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write to Learn: The Power Behind Writing Across the Curriculum • A Picture Is Worth 1000 Words: How to Use Graphics to Improve Math Performance • Dare to Summarize-- Dream Big, Start Small--How to Set the Groundwork for This Critical Skill • The Power of Quickwrites and How to Use Them to Improve Content Understanding 	5-9	Kristine Gibson
11/7/17	WIU #7, Latrobe, PA	The Big Three: Research-Based Practices That Make the Greatest Impact on Student Achievement	3-12	John Collins

See additional sessions on our website's [Public Schedule](#) including Morris-Union Jointure Commission (MUJC) sessions in New Jersey. If you don't see something in your area, check back soon!

Collins In-Service

Professional Development for Your Staff

Would you like to speak to a Collins Associate about offering a professional development session in your school or district? [Email](#) us or call us at 800-932-4477 to learn about options and pricing or to set up a FREE phone consultation. We offer highly competitive rates and will customize the training to suit your school's needs.



Collins Institutes

Save PD Dollars!

Institutes are a very popular Collins Writing Program training option. By hosting a [Collins Institute](#) in your school or district and opening it to outside participation, you can underwrite some or all of the costs of the workshop.

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About Our Newsletter

Helpful Resources for Busy Educators

Our goal is to make our newsletter rich with ideas, research, and resources related to writing and thinking skills instruction. We hope you will share it with other educators. Please forward *The Collins Writing Exchange* to your colleagues who might be interested.

For those of you who had this issue forwarded to you, [join our mailing list](#) to receive future issues directly.

Missed a previous issue? Read it now at [The Collins Writing Exchange Archive](#). Or click on a recent edition:

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